

Humboldt Park Boathouse Pavilion

1301 N. Humboldt Drive

Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks on November 1, 1995



CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
J. F. Boyle, Jr., Commissioner

Humboldt Park

Boathouse Pavilion

1301 N. Humboldt Drive

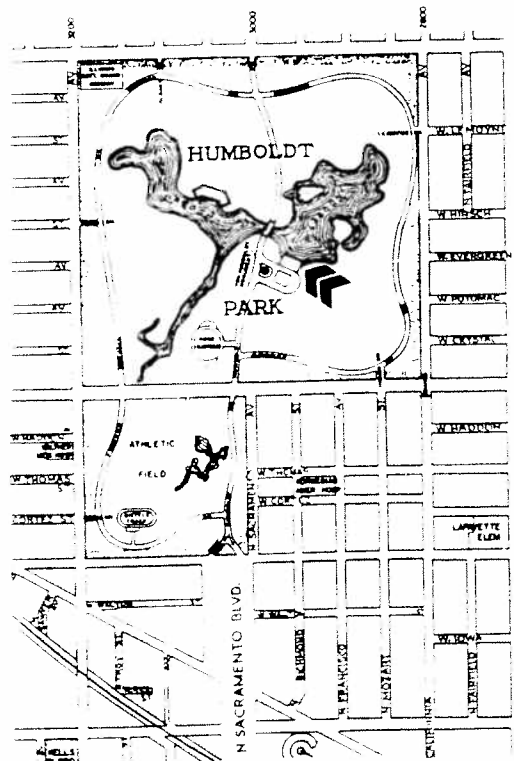
Date: 1906-07

Landscape Design: Jens Jensen
Architect: Richard E. Schmidt,
Garden & Martin

Few buildings are able to convey a powerful visual presence while, simultaneously, blending unobtrusively into a naturalistic setting. The deceptively simple ease in which the Humboldt Park Refectory and Boat Landing (Boathouse Pavilion) accomplishes both is a tribute to the creativity of its two designers, Hugh M.G. Garden and Jens Jensen.

The term "Prairie School" is often applied to buildings of this style. What makes this building unusual, however, is that its design *truly* is shaped by the Midwestern prairie, both in its site and in its building form.

The building's originality marked it--from its inception--as an important work in the development of modern architecture and landscape design. It was widely published in architectural journals of the period, and it is included in a wide variety of current books, establishing it as a seminal work in the city's extensive collection of significant architectural and landscape designs. In addition, the Humboldt Park Boathouse Pavilion is one of less than 200 buildings identified by the Chicago Historic Resources Survey as having the highest level of architectural significance--"to the city, state, and nation."



The boathouse pavilion is located on the shore of one of Humboldt Park's two lagoons.

Reconciling Architecture and Landscape

The Humboldt Park Boathouse Pavilion was designed in 1906, as part of a major improvement program for the 206-acre park.

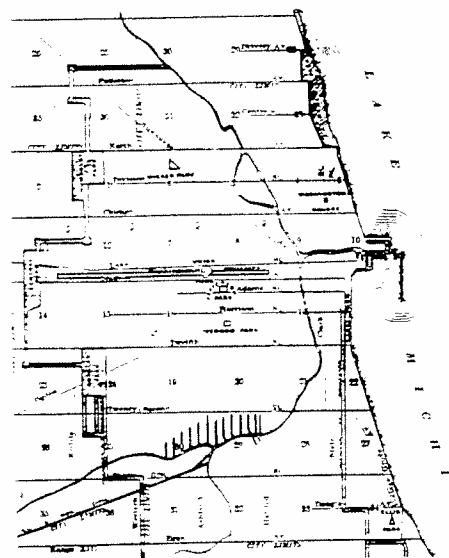
First laid out in 1869 by noted Chicago architect William LeBaron Jenney, Humboldt Park was one of three large parks that anchored the city's boulevard system on the West Side. It was named after Baron Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), a German naturalist, author, and statesman who popularized the idea of "living with nature."

By the beginning of the 20th century, however, Humboldt Park had fallen into general disrepair, and some sections had never been fully developed to the earlier plans of Jenney and Oscar F. Dubuis. The park's creative renaissance came in 1905 with the appointment of Jens Jensen (1860-1951) as superintendent and landscape architect of the Office of the West Chicago Park Commissioners, which had jurisdiction over west side parks.

Born in Denmark, Jensen came to Chicago in 1884, settling in the heavily Scandinavian neighborhood near Humboldt Park. He worked his way up through the West Park system, from laborer to various management positions (including Humboldt Park from 1895 to 1900) to superintendent.

The rapid rise of Jensen's reputation as an innovative park planner came out of his respect for the Midwestern landscape and its native plantings. Instead of imposing the type of formal ornamental landscaping used throughout the country, Jensen looked to the local topography for inspiration and beauty. Broad vistas of flat land were complemented by low horizontal-spreading trees and plantings, as well as buildings and park furniture that offered restful, inspiring qualities.

One of Jensen's first major projects in his new position was the planning of extensive improvements to Humboldt Park. By adapting portions of the existing park features and redesigning others, Jensen was able to reshape Humboldt Park in his distinctive prairie idiom. A



Humboldt Park, which is located northwest of the Loop, is one of three large parks laid out in the 1860s on the city's West Side (see map, above). Below: Jens Jensen, who as superintendent of the West Park Commission had a major impact on the landscape designs of several parks, including Humboldt.



An early pavilion in Humboldt Park, c.1880, designed in the then-common picturesque style.

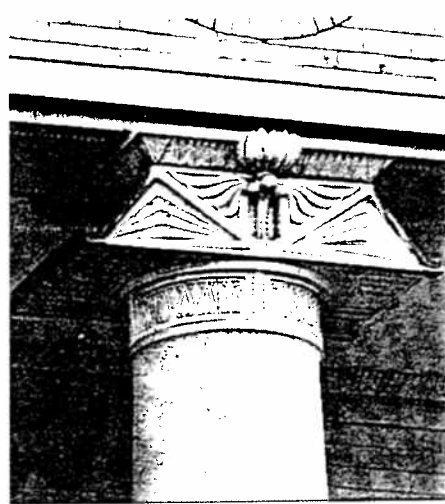
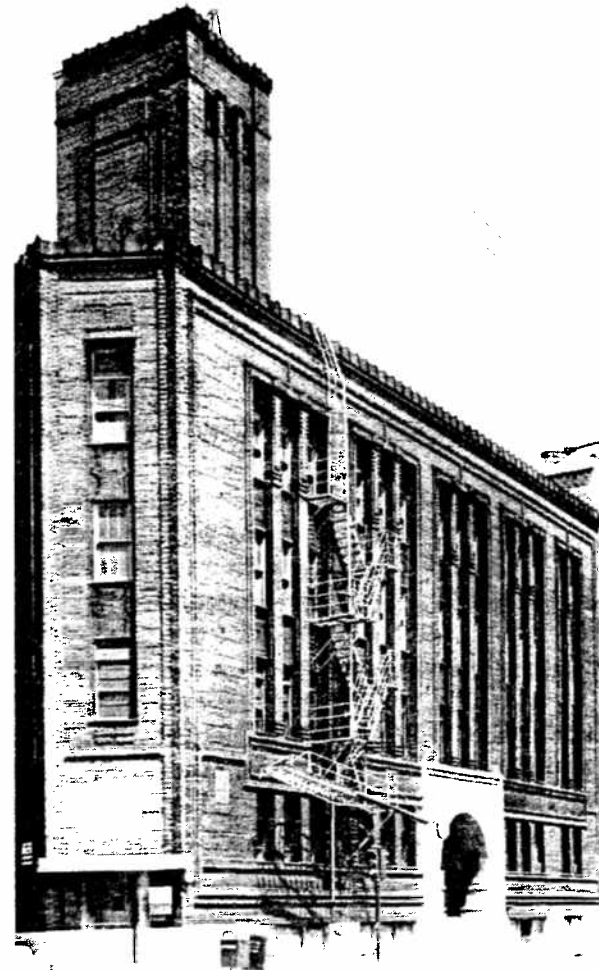
major change was the creation of two naturalistic lagoons, one of which—the eastern lagoon—was to be used for recreational boating in the summer and ice skating in the winter. These new uses, Jensen realized, would require construction of a boathouse and shelter, which he proposed for the lagoon's southern shore.

However, Jensen disliked the picturesque artificiality of the typical buildings being erected in public parks during the late-19th and early-20th centuries, which took many forms in attempting to relate to their settings. One recurring theme was the use of naturalistic materials, such as logs, branches, and imitation-thatched roofs, which were intended to make the buildings look natural and "blend in." Other park buildings used exaggerated and picturesque gables, rooflines, and materials to convey a sense of informality and recreation. Yet another approach was to use formal, classical buildings to provide a visual contrast to the park landscape, a style that was used by D.H. Burnham & Company in several South Side parks.

Fortunately, Jensen was able to find a kindred spirit in Chicago architect Hugh M. G. Garden (1873-1961), whose innovative, non-conventional designs had established him as one of the leaders of progressive architecture in the city. Like Jensen, Hugh Garden's receptiveness to new ideas can be attributed, in large part, to a background of on-the-job experience, instead of formal academic training. A native of Toronto,

The Humboldt Park Boathouse Pavilion's wide overhanging eaves, non-traditional ornament, and abstract geometric forms make it dramatically different from most park buildings of the period.

At the time the Humboldt Park Boathouse Pavilion was built, architect Hugh Garden was already well-known for such progressive designs as (clockwise, from right): the Schoenhofen Brewery; the Madlener House; Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church (shown here, a column detail); and the Chapin & Gore Building, seen here in a 1905 photograph.



Canada, Garden and his family moved in the late-1880s to Chicago, where he gained work as a draftsman in the offices of Flanders & Zimmerman, Henry Ives Cobb, Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge, and—as a freelance renderer—for Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright.

In 1895, he began a long association with the architectural firm of Richard E. Schmidt. Among the works attributed to Garden—both on his own and as a partner with Schmidt—are:

- ▶ Montgomery Ward Tower, 6 N. Michigan Ave. (1898);
- ▶ Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church, 2151 W. Washington Blvd. (1901);
- ▶ Grommes and Ullrich Building, 108-14 W. Illinois St. (1901);
- ▶ Madlener House, 4 W. Burton Pl. (1902);
- ▶ Schoenhofen Brewery Powerhouse, 18th and Canalport (1902);
- ▶ Chapin & Gore Building, 63 E. Adams St. (1904); and
- ▶ Montgomery Ward Warehouse, 604 W. Chicago Ave. (1906).

The Chapin & Gore, Madlener, Missionary Baptist, and Schoenhofen buildings all are designated Chicago Landmarks.

The Architecture of the Boathouse Pavilion

The Humboldt Park Boathouse Pavilion is a modestly built structure that serves various park functions, while being highly compatible with the park's overall landscape plan. Just as Jensen enhanced the horizontality of the Midwest prairie with low spreading trees and plantings, Garden gave the building a layered horizontality through the expressive use of materials.

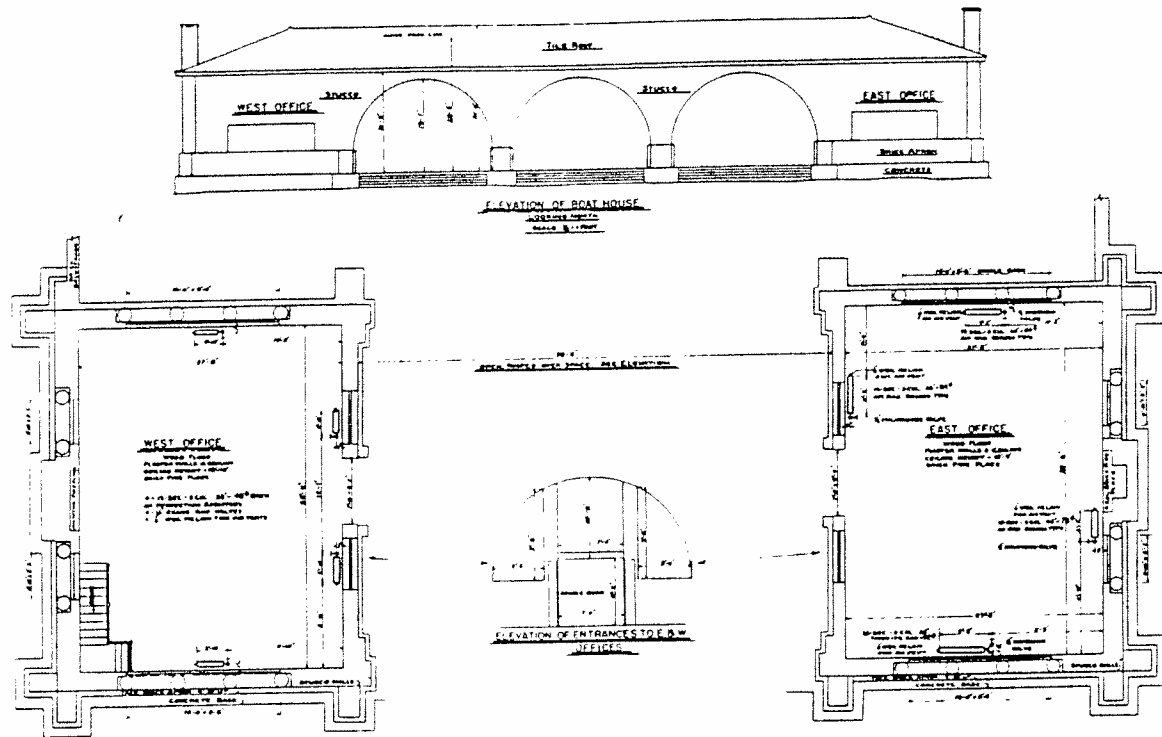
The building site is located between a recreational lagoon and a paved plaza intended for musical concerts and special events.

Consequently, the building's functions were diverse. The open-air pavilion was designed as a covered shelter and dining area ("refectory") for park patrons, as well as a place to view various park activities while protected from the elements.

The enclosed space at the west end of the



Architect Hugh M.G. Garden, in his later years.



While most of the Humboldt Park Boathouse Pavilion consists of a covered open-air shelter, enclosed rooms on either end were used for refreshments and weather protection (above). The shelter's 30-foot-wide arches (below) focus attention on the park's distant horizontal expanses of trees and sky.

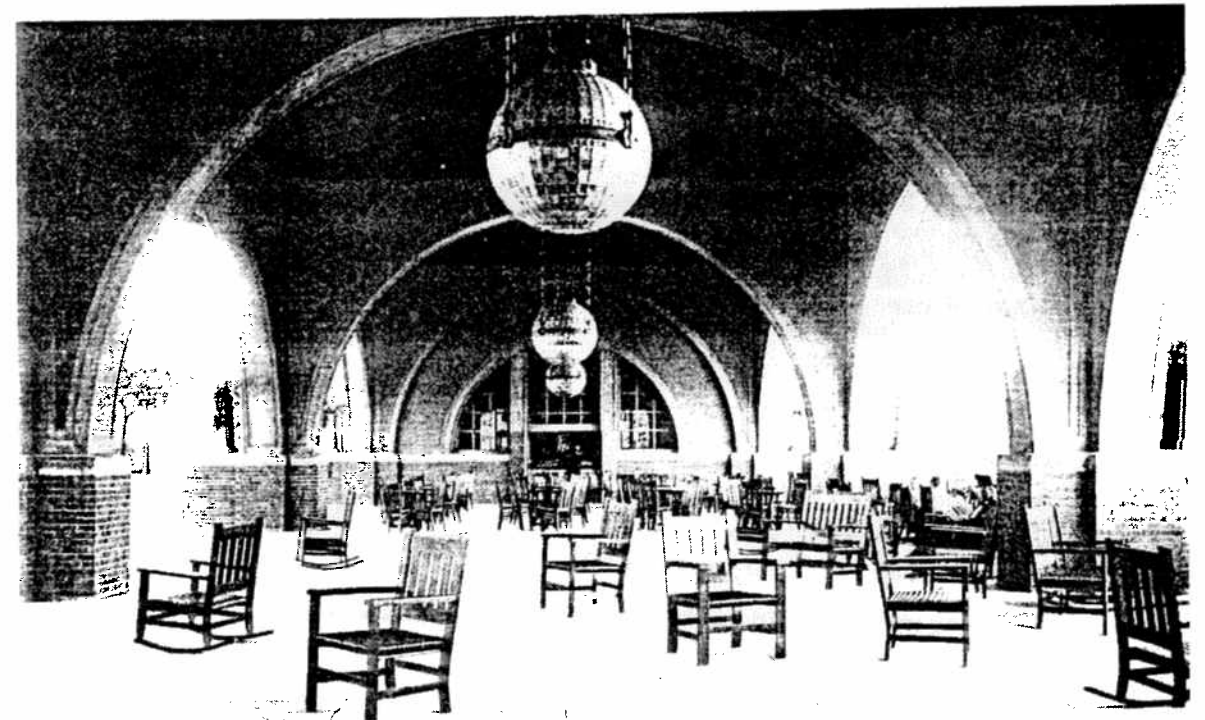


pavilion was labeled on the original plans as a "coffee room," while the eastern enclosure was to be a "resting room." Both rooms had fireplaces.

Below the pavilion, at water level, the boathouse accommodated the storage and rental of rowboats in the summer, and served as a warming room and changing facilities for ice skaters in the winter. The roof of the boathouse doubled as a paved terrace, which extended the seating area of the covered shelter outdoors.

Three semicircular arches—each 30-feet wide—define the architectural character of the pavilion's central shelter. In addition to their strong visual appeal, the arches frame dramatic vistas of the park, whether viewed from inside the shelter or, through it, from outside the shelter.

The pavilion combines solid masonry and stuccoed, wood-frame construction. The building sits on a base of irregularly colored smooth red brick, which is trimmed with courses of buff-colored, exposed-aggregate concrete. To emphasize the building's horizontality, the vertical joints between the bricks are filled—flush with the

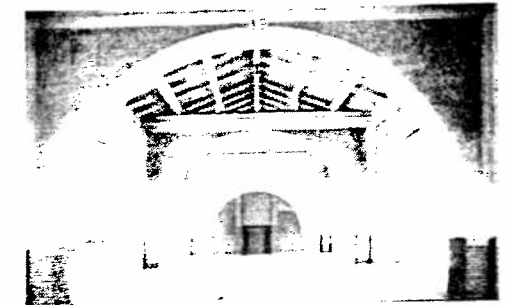


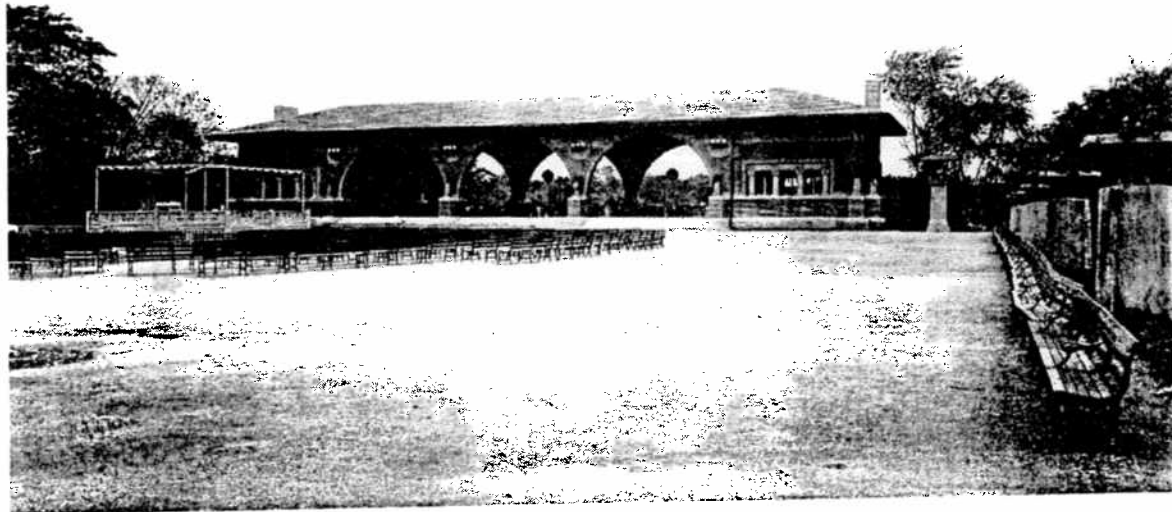
The use of circular motifs, both in the arches and fixtures, gives variety to the building's otherwise horizontal composition. The Japanese lantern-like globes (above) have since been removed, but the drama of the shelter interior remains much in evidence (below).

brick surface—with a matching mortar color. The horizontal joints, however, are recessed, and filled with a contrasting, buff-colored mortar. This technique, which makes the rows of brick appear as horizontal ribbons of masonry, was used by other Prairie School architects, including Frank Lloyd Wright (e.g., the Robie and Heller houses in Hyde Park).

Above the building's brick base, the stucco walls are ornamented with a variety of finishes and textures, giving a warmth and depth to the horizontal composition. Moldings, window frames, and ornamental friezes were originally finished with a smooth-faced, buff-colored stucco, while the wall surfaces were of a rough-textured, green-tinted stucco. (Both were painted yellow sometime after World War II.)

A low-pitched, hipped-style roof of green clay tiles—since replaced by black asphalt shingles—covered the entire structure, and wide overhanging eaves reinforced the building's horizontality and unity with the landscape. The intersection of the tongue-and-groove wood eaves with the exterior stucco walls is marked by a border of wood spheres—a creative alternative to the traditional cube-like "dentils" of most buildings of the period.





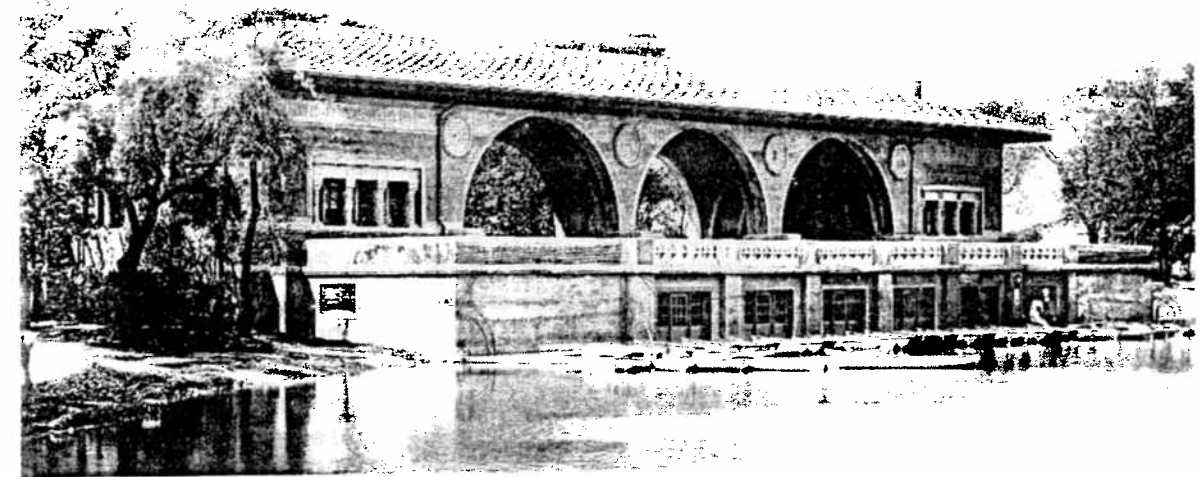
The effect of the building varies considerably between its north and south elevations. From the south (as seen in this 1908 photograph), the building appears as an extension of the paved Music Court.

The same materials and architectural forms are carried into the structure's interior. Stuccoed arches similar to those of the exterior span the interior, and the timber-roof framing is exposed. Together, they create a striking visual sense of strength and structure.

A one-story boathouse sits at the edge of the lagoon, at the base of the shelter. Its brick structure is covered with a rough-textured, brown-colored stucco, trimmed with horizontal courses of exposed aggregate concrete. A low, pre-cast concrete wall included decorative Prairie-style railings atop the boathouse entrances. (The open railings have since been filled in with a solid wall, and the stucco finishes have been painted gray.)

Due to its two-level, sloping site, the visual impact of the building is significantly different between its north and south sides. On the side facing the paved plaza to the south, the building sits slightly above grade on a raised platform, allowing it to be perceived as a sheltered extension of the plaza itself. The sweeping arches give the impression that the pavilion is gently touching the ground, while providing dramatic enframements for viewing the park's distant landscape features. These views do not include the lagoon on the opposite side of the building, which only can be "discovered" by walking through or around the building.

On the other hand, spectators in boats or



The pavilion's sloped site resulted in the north elevation being two stories tall, giving boaters on the lagoon an entirely different experience of the building than those viewing it from the Music Court (1917 photo).

on the shore of the lagoon—to the north of the Boathouse Pavilion—have an entirely different, foreshortened perspective of the building. Due to the lower level of the lagoon, the pavilion appears to soar above the boathouse, further emphasizing the broad eaves of the pavilion's overhanging roof.

The Landscape Design

Jens Jensen's plans for Humboldt Park (1905) incorporated many of the best and most characteristic aspects of his work as a landscape designer. Each of the broad, spreading trees and plantings was selected for the appropriateness of their shape, density, and seasonal color. Narrowly defined vantage points were created between plantings. These dramatic "long views" of earth, plantings, and sky, Jensen felt, would instill in park visitors an emotional impact of the natural environment. In describing his work at Humboldt Park, Jensen wrote:

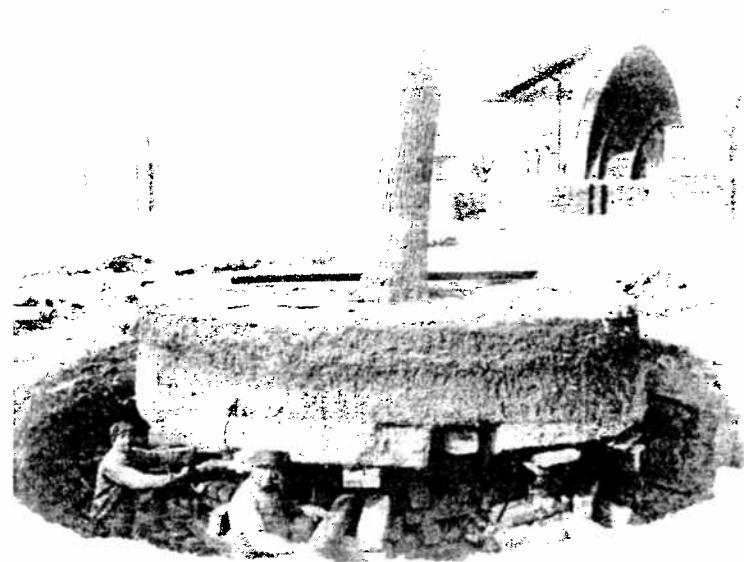
Of course, the primary motive was to give recreation and pleasure to the people, but the secondary motive was to inspire them with the vanishing beauty of the prairie. Therefore, I used many symbols of the prairie; i.e., plants with strongly horizontal branches or flower clusters that repeat in obvious or subtle ways the horizontal line of land and sky, which is the most impressive phenomenon on the boundless plains. Also, I aimed to recreate the atmosphere

of the prairie by restoring as high a proportion as possible of the trees, shrubs and flowers native to Illinois. (Miller)

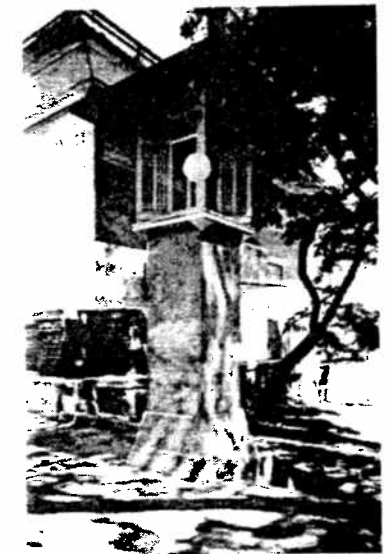
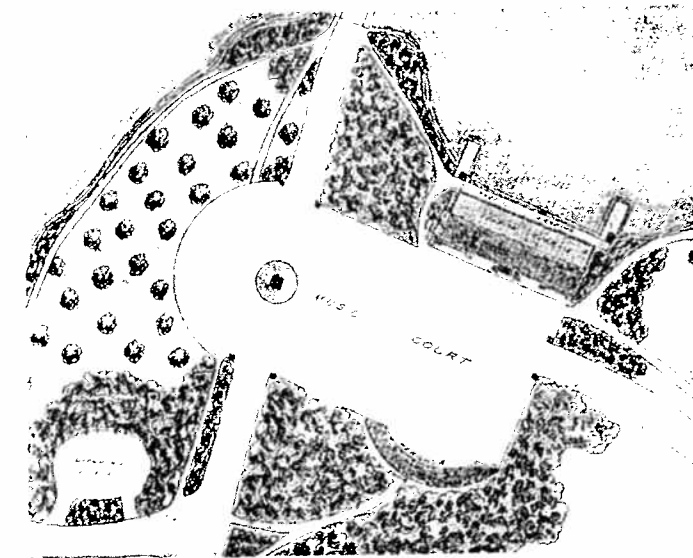
Water features were another important element of Jensen's plans for Humboldt Park, including the lagoons and a "prairie river," whose banks were lined by stratified stonework and marsh plants. He also was creative in reconciling the park's various natural settings with its necessary physical amenities. Park buildings, paved roadways, and light fixtures were integrated or, in some cases, separated through carefully composed architectural and landscape solutions.

For the park's more architecturally oriented aspects, Jensen worked in close collaboration with Hugh Garden, making it very difficult to separate their individual roles in the park's designs. For example, the distinctiveness of the park's light standards--tapering concrete bases, delicate bronze fretwork, and copper tent roofs--reflects some of Garden's previous work, but it is tempered by Jensen's unique vision. These characteristics are also evident in the design of other park features, such as benches and plazas.

The design integrity of the pavilion itself was as dependent on the unbuilt areas that surrounded it as it was on the design of the building. Of particular significance was the Music Court, just south of the pavilion. Essentially an



Workers in 1907 prepare to move a tree that had stood in front of the boathouse pavilion, in order to create an open Music Court area.



Jens Jensen's 1905 redesign of Humboldt Park (above, left) shows his concept for the site, including a Music Court and the shelter/terrace/boat landing. At right: one of the lanterns developed by Hugh Garden with Jensen.

open area for musical concerts and public assembly, the plaza was clearly defined--as a built environment amidst its naturalistic surroundings--by borders of custom-designed light standards and ornamental pylons holding stylized planting urns (since removed). A small covered shelter, also designed by Garden, originally defined the south end of the Music Court, but it has since been demolished. A statue of von Humboldt, atop a pedestal, still stands at the west end of the court.

One remarkable collaborative effort between the two designers is the park's Rose Garden, located southwest of the Music Court, on the other side of Humboldt Drive. The garden's formal planting beds, terraces, and pergolas were designed to be recessed--below the grade of the park--making the garden disappear from the park's overall horizontal vistas. Yet, at the same time, the garden provided a dramatic discovery for park visitors as they approached the pavilion. (A similar effect was used in concealing the lagoon behind the pavilion, making it invisible until visitors walked right up to it.)

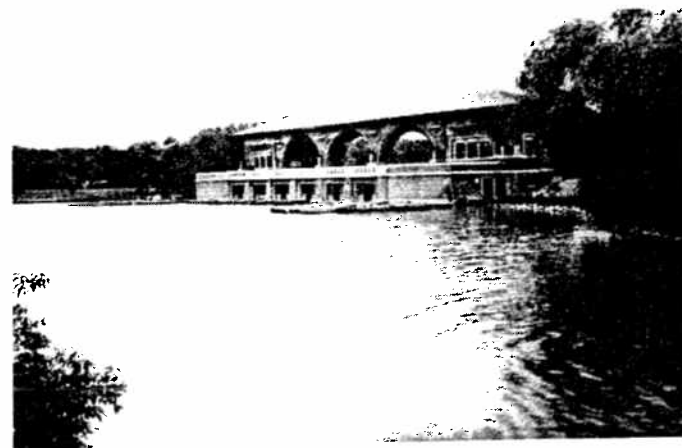
The Humboldt Park design was the last Chicago parks collaboration between Jensen and Garden, although they remained friends throughout their lives. Jensen, for example, later consulted with Garden on the design of Jensen's home and school, "The Clearing," in Ellison Bay, on Wisconsin's Door County Peninsula.

Conclusion

Hugh M.G. Garden and Jens Jensen were important figures in reshaping their respective fields of architecture and landscape design in the early 20th century. Garden, like his contemporaries, Louis H. Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, sought to evolve a progressive approach to architecture that was based on the creative expression of time, place, and function rather than the simple use of historical precedent. Similarly, Jensen creatively embraced the character of the broad Midwestern prairie in his solutions to park and landscape design, instead of merely imposing the rigid formality of traditional landscape design.

The broad lines of Garden's design for the Boathouse Pavilion, with its warm colorations of greens and browns, were integral with the sweeping horizontality of Jensen's creative interpretation of the Midwestern terrain and its native plantings. Although the building is visually anchored to its site—with a broad overhanging roof, solid brick base, and strongly massed side pavilions—it nevertheless treads lightly on its naturalistic setting, its wide, graceful arches making minimal contact with the ground, yet framing dramatic vistas of the landscape beyond.

Architecture and landscape design were only two of the many movements that underwent major changes and reforms at the turn of the century. Chicago was a leader in many aspects of these movements, and the designs of Humboldt Park and its Boathouse Pavilion evoke the originality that characterized the city's own cultural and social renaissance during that period.



APPENDICES

Criteria for Designation

The following criteria, as set forth in Section 2-210-620 of the Chicago Municipal Code, should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether the Humboldt Park Boathouse Pavilion should be recommended for landmark designation:

CRITERION I

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspects of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois or the United States.

The early 20th century brought Chicago an international reputation as a creative center of architecture, design, and social reform. The Humboldt Park Boathouse Pavilion is unusual in that it encompasses all three aspects in a single site.

The building was created out of the same social reform ideals for city living that gave birth to such nationally-known local institutions as Jane Addams' Hull House and the Chicago Commons. City parks were one of the few amenities that could be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of their economic status. Consequently, great emphasis was given to the development of inspiring naturalistic park environments.

The goal of creating this type of environment in Humboldt Park was ideally suited to the visionary talents of Hugh M.G. Garden and Jens Jensen, two of the major figures who helped establish the city's reputation at the turn of the century as a center of innovative architectural and landscape design.

CRITERION 4

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship.

The so-called Prairie School style of architecture is widely attributed to a group of Midwestern architects that practiced around the turn of the century, including Walter Burley Griffin, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Hugh M.G. Garden.

The Humboldt Park Boathouse Pavilion is an exceptional example of this style. It is listed in virtually every architectural history book about Chicago and the Prairie School, and it is cited in many books on the history of American architecture. It also is one of less than 200 buildings identified by the Chicago Historic Resources Survey as having the highest level of architectural significance--"to the city, state, and nation."

The Boathouse Pavilion is also an extremely rare example of a Prairie School design that was truly shaped by the Midwestern prairie, both in the landscaping of its site and in the form of the building itself. The building's broad lines are integral with the sweeping horizontality of Jens Jensen's landscape designs for Humboldt Park. Its wide graceful arches make minimal contact with the ground, yet they frame dramatic vistas of the landscapes beyond.

The building's craftsmanship also represents the epitome of high-quality Prairie School design. Its stucco walls are ornamented with a variety of finishes and geometric details, railings and lanterns were specially designed, and the building's brick base was detailed to appear as thin ribbons of masonry--further reinforcing the overall horizontality of the composition.

CRITERION 5

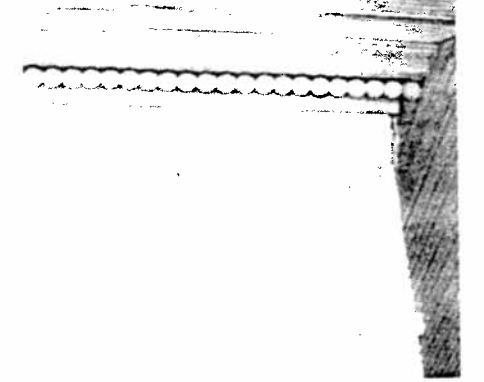
Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the U.S.

The design of the Humboldt Park Boathouse Pavilion represents a collaboration between Hugh

M. G. Garden and Jens Jensen, two figures who were instrumental in reshaping their respective fields of architecture and landscape design in the early 20th century.

Hugh Garden (1873-1961), like his contemporaries, Louis H. Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, helped evolve a progressive approach to design that continues to influence modern architecture. His long association with the renown firm of Schmidt, Garden & Martin resulted in such outstanding--and innovative--works as the Madlener House, the Montgomery Ward Warehouse, and the Schoenhofen Brewery. The style and details of Garden's architectural designs were so unique and distinctive that they often are referred to with the term "Gardenesque."

Jens Jensen (1860-1951) was widely considered the dean of modern American landscape architecture. He championed the preservation of the native Midwestern landscape, including the protection of the Indiana Dunes, the creation of the forest preserve network that surrounds Chicago, and the acquisition of nearly a dozen state parks. His designs for such city parks as Columbus, Douglas, Garfield, and Humboldt embraced the character of the broad Midwestern prairie, and included such innovative features as prairie rivers, council rings, and native plantings.



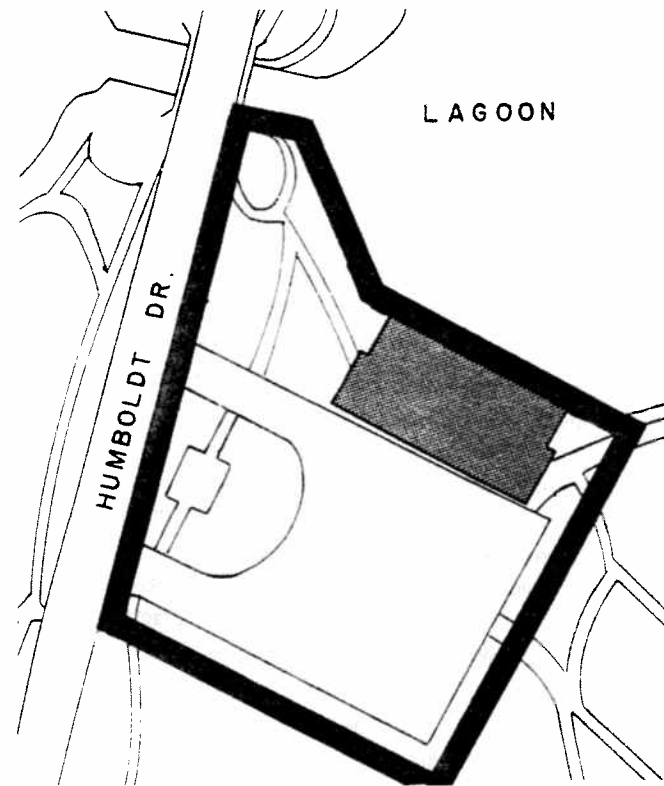
The building's geometric details include unique spherical "dentils" beneath the wide overhanging roof eaves.

Significant Historical and Architectural Features

Whenever a building or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks identifies the significant features of the property, in order for owners and the public to understand which elements are most important to the significance of the landmark. These features also are important in carrying out the Commission's permit review responsibilities to evaluate the effect of proposed alterations to "any significant historical or architectural feature" of the landmark or landmark district (as required by Section 2-120-770, 780 of the Municipal Code).

Based on its evaluation of the Humboldt Park Boathouse Pavilion, the staff recommends that the significant historical and architectural

Its originality of form and details marks the Humboldt Park Boathouse Pavilion as one of the city's premier examples of Prairie School design.



The recommended "significant features" of this proposed landmark designation are: the boathouse pavilion (shaded), as well as the open space and various design elements--pylons, urns, lanterns--that were designed by Jensen and Garden (outlined area).

features for the preservation of this building be identified as:

- ▶ all exteriors, including the roofline, of the principal structure (Boathouse and Pavilion);
- ▶ the open Music Court to the south of the boathouse pavilion, including four ornamental light standards (lanterns) and a series of planter urn pylons along the east side of the court;
- ▶ the open land immediately east of the building and extending to the existing footpath; and
- ▶ the open land immediately west of the building and extending to Humboldt Drive.

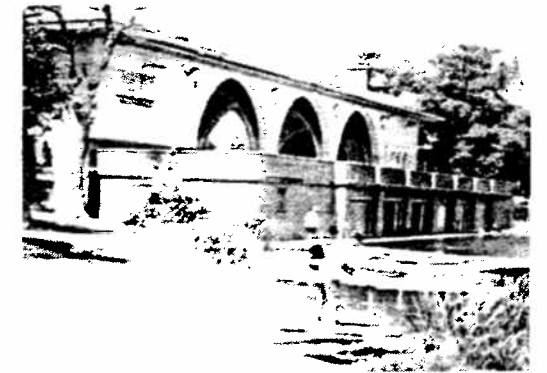
Permit Review and Rehabilitation Issues

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks bases its review of all city-issued permits related to a landmark property on its published *Guidelines for Alterations to Historic Buildings and New Construction*. The purpose of the Commission's review is to protect and enhance the landmark's existing significant historical and architectural features (see previous section).

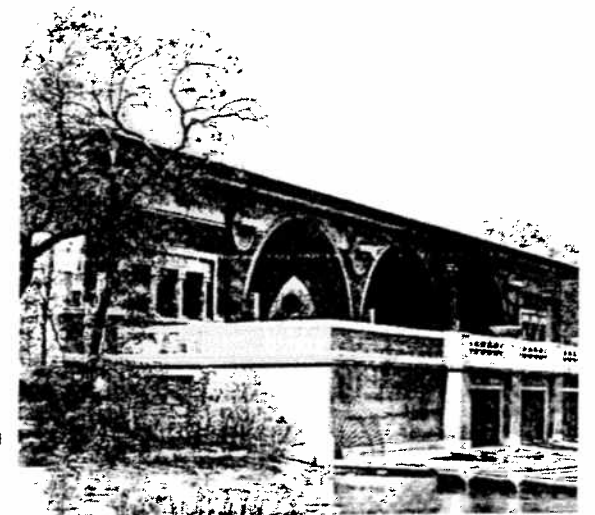
At the time of this publication, the exterior of the Humboldt Park Boathouse Pavilion was in a deteriorated condition, although it retained most of its significant architectural features. These features should be maintained and preserved.

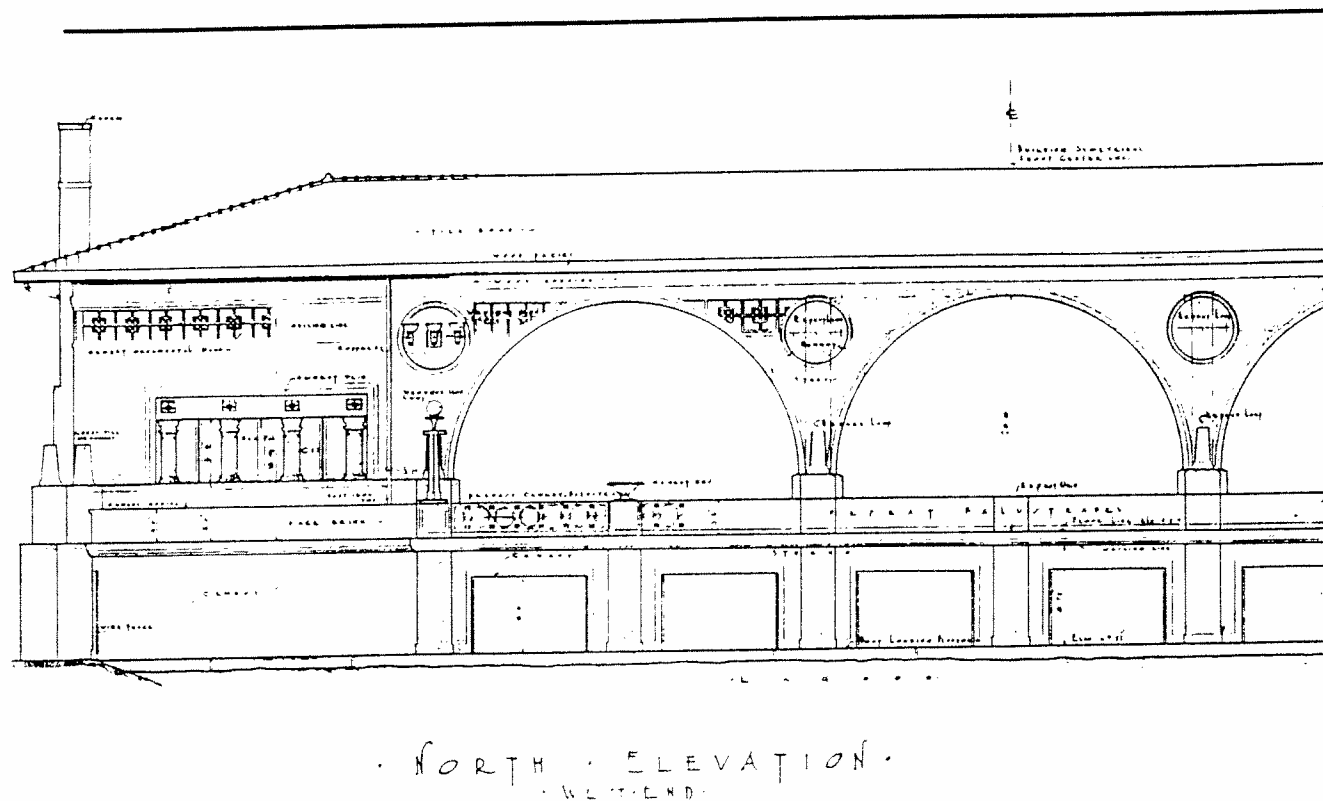
Those significant features which have been altered or removed include:

- ▶ the original exterior colors and finishes of stucco and wood surfaces, which have been painted over with inappropriate colors (see page 7);
- ▶ the original green clay tile roof, which has been replaced with black asphalt shingles;
- ▶ the original lighting fixtures on the building exterior, the shelter interior, and on the balustrade of the lagoon terrace—all of which have been removed;
- ▶ the decorative open-railing portion of the balustrade at the lagoon edge of the terrace, which has been replaced by a wall;
- ▶ the horizontal mortar joints of the brick base, which originally were recessed, have been repointed flush with the brick surface;
- ▶ the original doors and windows on the main building and boathouse, which have been covered over or removed;
- ▶ the planting urns at the "spring" of the arches, along the lagoon terrace balustrade, and atop the east pylons of the Music Court, all of which have been removed.



Two views of the boathouse pavilion--from 1995 (above) and c.1910 (below), showing some of the alterations that have taken place.





NORTH ELEVATION
WEST END

Above: an original drawing of the building's north elevation. Although largely intact, many of the building's light fixtures and railings have been removed or altered, and the buff- and green-tinted stucco has been painted yellow. Below: a current detail from the building showing the spandrel area between the arches.



Any design review of these missing features by the Commission will take into account the Chicago Park District's financial ability to fund improvements or modifications to the features.

Any proposals for additions or alterations to the landmark would be reviewed to ensure that they would be compatible with the building and site, and would not alter, obscure, or demolish any significant features.

It is recommended that any building rehabilitation work should be done in accordance with the previously mentioned Commission's Guidelines, as well as the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's *Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*. Rehabilitation work on the landscape portions of the landmark should be done in accordance with the Secretary's *Guidelines for the Treatment of Historic Landscapes*.

In either instance, the work should be based on thorough documentation, much of which is in the collection of the Chicago Park District.

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Acknowledgments

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Illustrations

Chicago Park District Archives

(cover, pp. 6 top, 8, 9, 10, 11 left, 12, 18 top)

Collection of Augie Chidichimo

(inside front cover)

Department of Planning and Development

(pp. 1, 4, 16)

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Timothy Barton, DPD

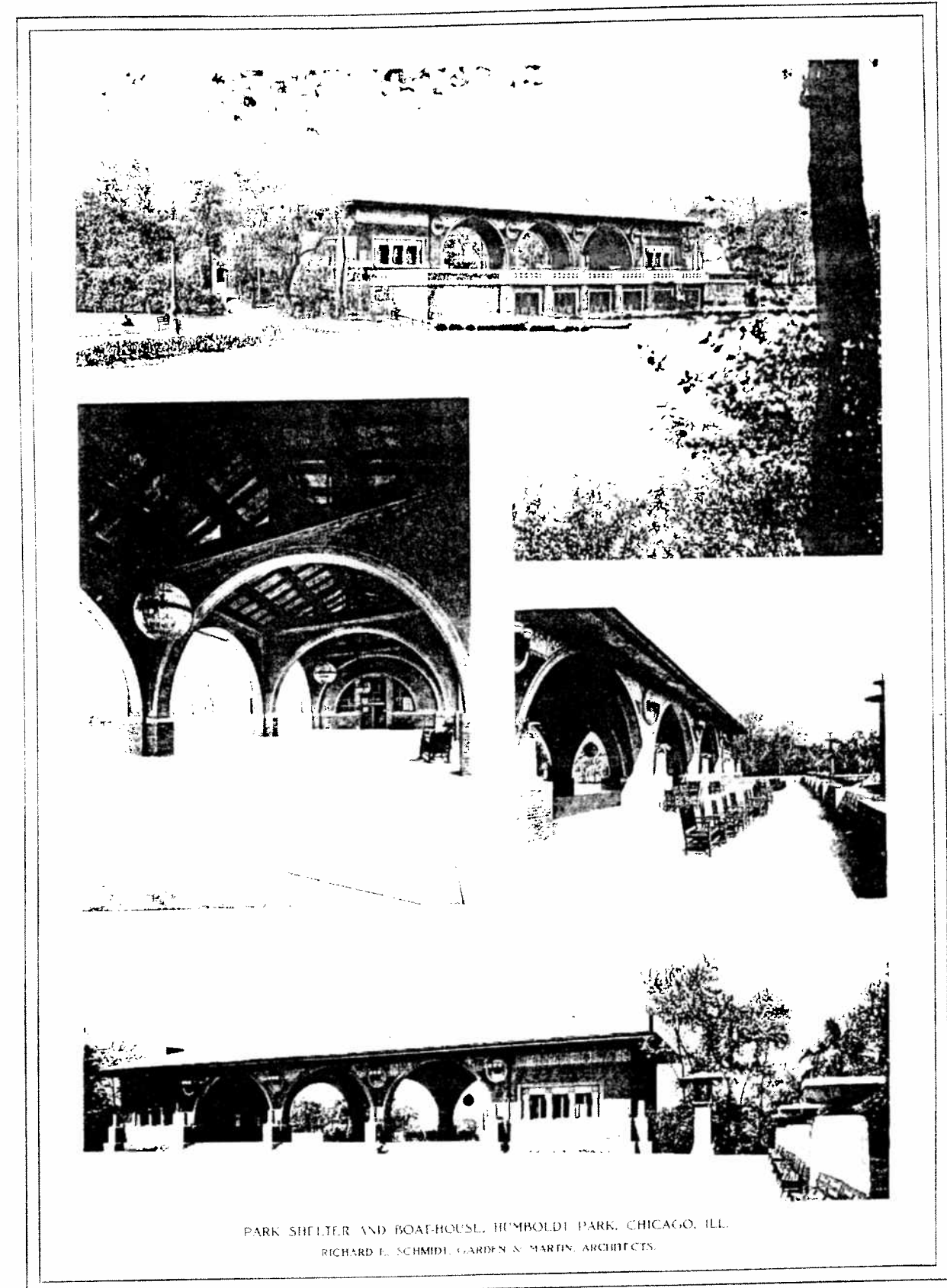
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PARK SHELTER AND BOAT-HOUSE, HUMBOLDT PARK, CHICAGO, ILL.
RICHARD E. SCHMIDT, GARDEN & MARTIN, ARCHITECTS.

A page of illustrations from an article in the May 1908 issue of *The Architectural Review*, a national monthly magazine.

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